

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's (AHLZ-high-merz) is a disease that results in the loss of brain cells. It is the most common form of dementia, which is a group of brain disorders that cause confusion and problems with memory, thinking and reasoning.

Alzheimer's is not a mental illness or a part of normal aging. There is no cure, and there is no single test to diagnose it. Alzheimer's gets worse over time. However, there are treatments and medications available to help ease symptoms. If you or a loved one is having major memory problems, see a doctor to find the cause.

Alzheimer's disease also makes it harder and harder for people to carry out their daily activities. Family members may have to take on many caregiving responsibilities, from helping the person bathe and eat to making money and legal decisions.

Impact on African-Americans

African-Americans may be more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease (compared to White Americans). Some of the possible reasons are that we have higher rates of blood pressure and diabetes, all risk factors for Alzheimer's.

However, increasing age is the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's. Millions of baby boomers—the first now turning 60—are nearing the age of greatest risk; by the year 2030, the number of African-Americans 65 or older is expected to more than double to 6.9 million.

District of Columbia Resources

10,000 Washingtonians have Alzheimer's disease

and more than 50,000 Washingtonians have a family member with Alzheimer's disease. You are not alone. In fact, you are surrounded by neighbors who care and a public-private partnership between the DC Office on Aging, the Alzheimer's Association and African American churches to meet your caregiving and spiritual needs.

The Alzheimer's Association offers:

- Free local support groups to help families manage the stress and hardship of caregiving
- Hands-on training for family caregivers to improve the quality of care for your loved one and improve your confidence as a caregiver
- Skill building training to long-term care organizations — hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living, adult day centers, and home care agencies
- Free Helpline telephone counseling and support to over 1,000 Washingtonians annually
- Safe Return services to approximately 400 Washingtonians at risk of wandering

The District of Columbia Office on Aging, working with community partners, offers:

- Respite care assistance
- Home delivered and congregate meal programs
- Transportation assistance
- Health insurance counseling

Contact Information:

District of Columbia Office on Aging
202 724 5622 | <http://dcoa.dc.gov>

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alzheimer's  association™

aging with grace

African-Americans and Alzheimer's Disease



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sundays are the best days, especially when aunt helen is feeling like herself



African-Americans and Alzheimer's Disease

As we age, most of us eventually notice some slowed thinking and problems remembering certain things. However, serious memory loss, confusion and other major changes in the way our minds work are not a normal part of aging. They could be signs of Alzheimer's disease.

Today 4.5 million people have Alzheimer's. And African-Americans may be at especially high risk for the disease. But there are things you can do. Learn more about Alzheimer's, how you can reduce your risk and how to get stress relief if you are caring for a loved one with dementia.

How to be an Empowered Caregiver— Staying Strong

If you are caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or another dementia, the best thing you can do is empower yourself. Learn everything you can about the disease and where to get help and support.

Understand that a person with Alzheimer's will have clear and lucid moments. They will also behave in unpredictable ways. They are not acting this way on purpose, so try not to take it personally or get upset.

If you feel overwhelmed, take care of yourself. Get connected with your local Alzheimer's Association for information, support and referrals to community services.

Alzheimer caregivers report that they frequently experience high levels of stress. Too much stress can be damaging to both a caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's.

If you experience some of these signs of stress on a regular basis, consult your doctor. Ignoring them can cause your physical and mental health to decline.

Symptoms of caregiver stress

- Denial
- Exhaustion
- Anger
- Sleeplessness
- Social withdrawal
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Lack of concentration
- Depression
- Health problems

Be a Healthy Caregiver

Taking care of yourself is one of the most important ways to be a healthy caregiver.

- **Know what resources are available.** Adult day care, in-home assistance, visiting nurses and Meals-on-Wheels are just some of the services that can help you.

- **Become an educated caregiver.** As the disease progresses, new caregiving skills are necessary.
- **Get help.** You are not failing as a caregiver by asking others for assistance. Seek the support of family, friends and community resources including your faith community. Alzheimer's Association support group meetings are a good source of comfort and reassurance.
- **Take care of yourself.** Watch your diet, exercise and get plenty of rest. Make time for shopping, lunch with friends or even a golf outing. Take advantage of community services such as adult day care or in-home companion services to care for your loved one while you take a break.
- **Manage your stress level.** Stress can cause physical problems and changes in behavior. If you experience symptoms of caregiver stress, use relaxation techniques that work for you, and consult your doctor.
- **Accept changes as they occur.** People with Alzheimer's change and so do their needs. They often require care beyond what you can provide on your own. Look into care services such as in-home caregiver services and residential care.
- **Do legal and financial planning.** Consult an attorney to discuss legal, financial and care issues. If possible and appropriate, involve the person with Alzheimer's and other family members.
- **Be realistic.** Many of the behaviors that occur are beyond your control and the control of the person with Alzheimer's. Grieve your losses, but also focus on the positive moments.
- **Give yourself credit, not guilt.** You are doing the best you can. Don't feel guilty because you can't do more. Your loved one needs you, and you are there — that should make you feel proud.